

**Minutes of the Special Meeting  
of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education  
Monday, October 24, 2016  
5:10 p.m. –7:00 p.m.  
Department of Elementary and Secondary Education  
75 Pleasant Street, Malden, MA**

**Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Present:**

**Paul Sagan**, Chair, Cambridge  
**James Morton**, Vice-Chair, Boston  
**Katherine Craven**, Brookline  
**Ed Doherty**, Boston  
**Margaret McKenna**, Boston  
**Nathan Moore**, Chair, Student Advisory Council, Scituate  
**Michael Moriarty**, Holyoke  
**James Peyser**, Secretary of Education  
**Mary Ann Stewart**, Lexington

**Mitchell D. Chester**, Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education, Secretary to the Board

**Members of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Absent:**

**Roland Fryer**, Cambridge  
**Pendred Noyce**, Boston

Chair Sagan called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m. and welcomed Board members and the public. Commissioner Chester said that in November 2015, the Board approved the Commissioner's recommendation to review the English language arts and mathematics frameworks, in conjunction with the development of a next-generation assessment. He said the Department collected many comments and proposed edits from the field and the public, as well as from panels of educators and experts. He said the standards review set out to ensure that Massachusetts continues its history of ambitious, clear, and coherent standards. The commissioner said tonight's discussion would update the Board on the process and highlight the proposed changes.

Associate Commissioner Heather Peske introduced staff overseeing the review: Rachel Bradshaw, ESE ELA/literacy specialist; Susan Wheltle, project consultant and retired ESE literacy and humanities director; Connie Varoudakis, ESE mathematics specialist; and Barbara Libby, project consultant and retired ESE STEM director. Ms. Peske reviewed the history of the Massachusetts standards and the process for reviewing them.

Ms. Wheltle said the review is encouraging educators to provide input after five years of implementing the standards. She said the review aims to preserve the Commonwealth's ambitious standards, while at the same time looking at areas that educators flagged for improvement. She said these include: reading closely and writing about complex texts; addressing literacy concepts; increasing coherence, focus, rigor, and clarity; and providing resources. Ms. Wheltle said to address reading closely and writing about complex texts, the Department is suggesting making explicit cross-references among the standards, providing examples of effective teaching, expanding the glossary, and including explanatory material on qualitative measures of text complexity. She outlined specific examples of the revisions.

On the topic of addressing literacy concepts, Ms. Wheltle said Massachusetts educators found these standards difficult to implement because they were too genre-specific and restricted teachers' choice of literacy texts. She said the proposed revisions include integrating the content into other reading, writing, speaking and listening standards; streamlining the standards for reading literature and writing; and deepening the importance of conceptual knowledge of literature by applying it to speaking, listening, reading, and writing. She outlined specific examples of the revisions.

In response to Secretary Peyser's question on close reading, Ms. Wheltle said the proposed revisions add a section on reading closely that includes details. She said reading closely is a needed skill that should be used in moderation and in the right places. Secretary Peyser suggested adding more information on close reading in the introduction. In response to the Secretary's question regarding grade-level reading, Ms. Wheltle said the curriculum standards set the floor for what students should know and be able to do, and educators can and do go beyond. Mr. Moriarty commented that the standards are aspirational versus prescriptive on getting students to grade-level but do not address remediation; he said remediation must be done but does not belong in the framework. Ms. McKenna expressed concern about reading in the kindergarten standards. Ms. Stewart expressed concern about schools' ability to weave in other topics and ensuring that students have the essential skills they need after high school.

Ms. Varoudakis said the major recommendations for the mathematics standards include: options for course-taking sequences; increasing coherence, focus, rigor, and clarity; narrowing grade span descriptions; and updating appendices. She reviewed the organization of the mathematics framework and domains of progression. She said the Department's separate guidance document, "Making Decisions about Course Sequence," was helpful for educators but was not widely used, so the recommendation is to expand it and add it to the framework. Secretary Peyser suggested a crosswalk between the updated standards and widely used curriculum programs. Ms. Varoudakis reviewed examples of recommendations and rationales for recognizing patterns, consistent language and definitions, rates, and visual models. Ms. Libby said other states also grappled with the issue of knowing from memory and the need to recall quickly. She said the topics in the framework strike a good balance between memorization and flexible thinking about numbers.

Mr. Moriarty said he is pleased to see cursive writing included in the standards. Ms. Bradshaw addressed Ms. McKenna's earlier question regarding kindergarten. She said the reference to reading in kindergarten was addressed by the panel, and the correction was made. In response to Mr. Morton's question, Ms. Peske said ensuring that all students are served will be a focus of implementation. Secretary Peyser suggested preparing an explanation of the standards for parents and additional framing of themes and issues, such as close reading, information text vs. literary text, inclusion of pre-21<sup>st</sup> century text, and the importance of encouraging students to read a lot.

Commissioner Chester thanked members for their input and staff for the thoughtful presentation. He said the team will continue to incorporate revisions and bring the standards back to the Board in November for a vote to send them out for public comment.

**On a motion duly made and seconded, it was:**

**VOTED:       that the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adjourn the meeting  
                  at 7:00 p.m., subject to the call of the Chair.**

The vote was unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,  
Mitchell D. Chester  
Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education  
and Secretary to the Board